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China Painting.

TALKS ON FIRING CHINA.

I.



BACCARAT VASE. BY "KAPPA."

(SEE PLATE 642 AND PAGE 23.)

changes in transportation. And then the delays on the road and breakages are sure to occur through some one's carelessness. Altogether, it is discouraging, and I have about determined not to paint another thing."

"I am sorry, for with your skill you ought to decorate china for other people, and add something to your income."

"That I should like to do; but I cannot leave home, and it is impracticable here."

"Do you know anything about firing?"

"I know enough of the difficulties, but of the practical part I know very little. I have several books on china painting, but all seem to avoid that part of the process as if it was either too intricate to be understood by common mortals, or some secret art to be reserved for the few."

"Nonsense! You cannot only understand it, but with a proper kiln you can do the firing yourself."

"Do you mean *here*, at home?"

"Yes, at home; but if you wish to learn how, I must begin at the beginning, and tell you how china is generally fired."

"Oh, I know that much. There are china decorators in all the large cities who have kilns, and they do amateur firing also. They have some kind of a furnace, I suppose."

"Yes, it is something like a furnace, yet not a furnace. Rather call it an oven, not low like a baker's oven, but narrow and tall, sometimes six or eight feet high, and raised from the ground about three feet, on little piers of brick at the corners. These are generally built in cellars, where there is an open draught to a chimney. They are lined with fire-brick, and fire-brick forms the floor, so that the fire can't come in contact with it. Some kilns are large enough for a man to stand in, and around the sides at regular distances are small projections. These are rests for the shelves, which are placed in successively, as the kiln is filled. Beginning at the bottom, the heavier ware is arranged as compactly as possible, those that require most firing at the bottom."

"You do not mean that one piece is placed on top of another?"

"I do; but they ought not to come in contact with each other or with the kiln. This is managed by using stilts, which are small triangular pieces of unglazed ware made especially for the purpose. When these are placed between the decorated ware,

each article stands by itself. When the kiln is filled to the top, the door, made also of fire-brick, is closed. Inserted between these bricks, at a convenient height, is a bit of glass through which the condition of the ware can be seen. This must be examined frequently, and when a thin haze pervades the interior of the kiln, the firing is done. I forgot to say, after the china is packed and the door closed, the fire is built below; wood is generally used; and when the firing is done the bed of coals is drawn away with large iron shovels."

"What a laborious operation! No woman could manage that."

"It is laborious; but I know of one faience decorator whose wife, besides her household cares, fires all her husband's work. Indeed, he thinks no one else can do it as well."

"What is the object in drawing away the coals?"

"Simply to reduce the heat, of which there has been sufficient. This great mass of brick must cool off then, before the china can be removed."

"That must take a great many hours?"

"Yes, it does. When they use such large kilns, the fire is generally started about six P.M., drawn away at ten, and left to cool until morning. Even then it is not stone cold, but it can be handled."

"I can see how much experience and skill all this requires, and of course it is absolutely impossible for me to think of doing it."

"Yes, it would be, if you were obliged to do it in this way; but there are portable kilns made now to be used in homes, and the very latest invention, to be fired with gas, seems to me practicable for you even in this 'out-of-the-way place,' as you call it."

"Well, we do have gas, if it is out of the way."

lined, cover and all, with fire-clay. An iron pot a little smaller fits inside the clay, with a cover also. Within this last iron pot are projections to hold perforated iron shelves. Both covers have a tube, funnel-shaped, large on the inside, the smaller end projecting from the outside cover, through which you may look down upon the



PLATE DECORATED BY DAMMOUSE.

china and gauge the heat. The outer cover has a large opening for a small stove-pipe. There is a small space all around the inner pot, between it and the fire-clay.

Through this the smoke from the gaslight flows, and passes off by the stove-pipe at the top. The tube passing through both covers, which I just now spoke of, to enable one to look down at the china, answers another purpose as well; it is really an absolute necessity, for through it rises the steam from the china."

"Steam! I don't see why there should be any steam; there's no water about it!"

"Not a drop! Nevertheless, a good deal of steam will arise engendered by the heat, and if you do not know how to take care of it, your ware will be spoiled. That causes one of the difficulties in firing china."

"Where could I put this thing; and how large is it. Could I lift it?"

"Three questions in one. Beginning with the last, I think you could lift the smallest size, and you could put it on a strong table in your working-room or studio. You could connect the gas-stove at the bottom by a rubber pipe to the gas tube in your room, provided there is a pressure of fifteen feet of gas per hour. This small kiln can be fired in an hour. The larger ones take from three to four hours."

"Do you think it is safe to allow such a flow of gas on your table at your side?"

"The same degree of heat is required for a small gas-stove as for the smallest size kiln."

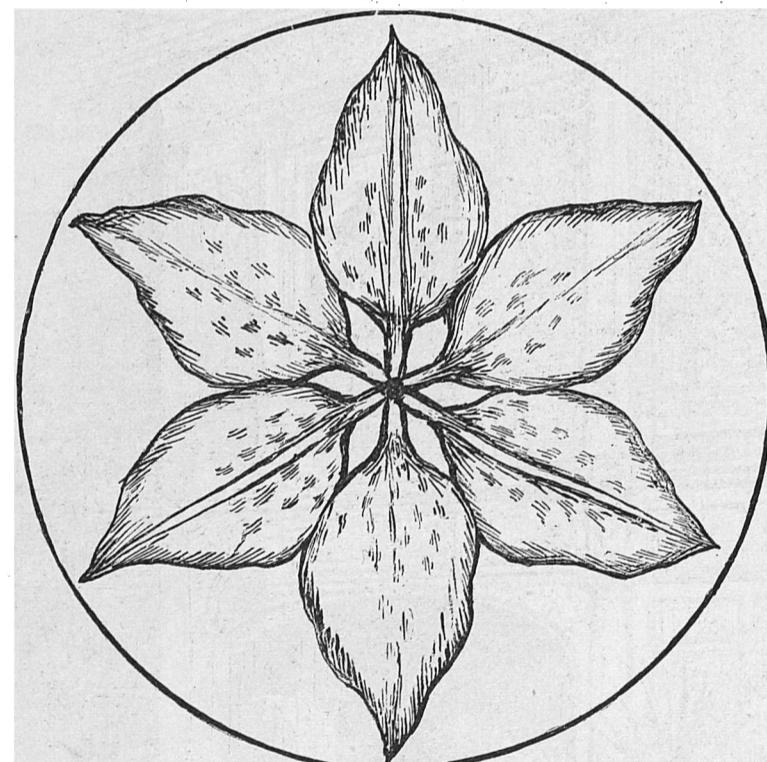
"And you are quite sure that I would not have the difficulties to contend with that decorators generally have, such as too little draught or too much, too much heat or too little, and hosts of others, which loom up in imagination at least, if not in reality."

"No, I do not say that. Firing is a delicate process under the most favorable conditions and with the best facilities; but women have done it and are constantly doing it, and I advise you to try it."

"Well, I wish I could see it done before I try it. Do you really advise me to send for one of these you speak of, and take the risk?"

"No, I would rather you would not until I can tell you about two other portable kilns I know of. In fact, two friends of mine own them, and I would much rather you should make a choice."

L. S. K.



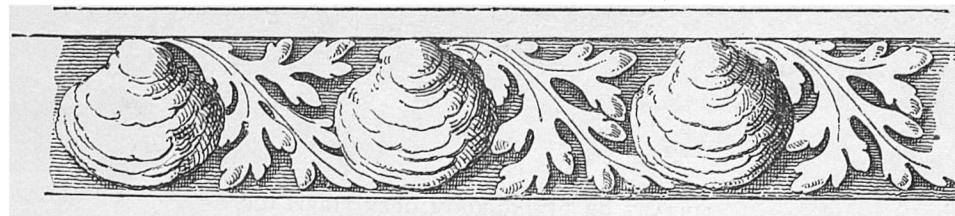
FULL-SIZE DESIGN FOR COVER OF BACCARAT VASE.

(SEE PLATE 642 AND PAGE 23.)

"Then you can do it without the least difficulty."

"Tell me about it. I can hardly wait to hear!"

"The kiln is an iron pot about two and a half feet in



SHELL AND SEA-WEED BORDER FOR FISH-PLATE DECORATION.

diameter, with legs about ten inches high. The pot is shaped like an egg, or rather like a shell, cut in two in the middle, the upper part forming the cover. It is

about two other portable kilns I know of. In fact, two friends of mine own them, and I would much rather you should make a choice."